

LSS Sermon Starter Story

June 7, 2026

You are welcome to use the following “sermon starter” content in your own sermon. Feel free to use content verbatim or edit as you see fit to adapt to your own voice and context. Client names have been changed to respect privacy.

Readings (Revised Common Lectionary)

- Hosea 5:15—6:6
- Psalm 50:7-15
- Romans 4:13-25
- Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

When we choose to follow Jesus, he leads us to places where—perhaps—we’d rather not go. He introduces us to people who—perhaps—we might otherwise avoid. But disciples of Jesus can’t look away. Disciples of Jesus have to look out for the people everyone else has given up on.

In today’s passage from the gospel of Matthew, Jesus takes us on a whirlwind tour of ministry on the margins. Look, here is Matthew, a scorned tax collector, invited by Jesus into discipleship. Look, here is Jesus breaking bread with a crowd of sinners. Look, here is Jesus abruptly leaving dinner to go and lay hands on a girl who has died. Look, here is Jesus stopping and turning, touching and healing the bleeding woman.

The circumstances grow more desperate, and yet none of the people we meet is too far gone for Jesus’s love to reach them. Not even the girl whose family believes she has died. Jesus goes to her bedside, takes her by the hand, and she gets up.

This girl’s miraculous healing helps us see that in each of these examples, Jesus has restored these sisters and brothers to new life, by bringing them out of a state of isolation and into a community of abundant life among the disciples.

One way we, as disciples of Jesus, carry on his ministry of healing and restoration is through the ministry of Lutheran Social Services. Following the example of Jesus, LSS specializes in quietly ministering to people who have been pushed to the margins of society by addiction, mental health struggles, homelessness, family crisis, poverty. Through your support for LSS, you respond to hurting neighbors with love—fostering connection, hope, and healing.

I want to share one more example with you. This story is not in the Gospel of Matthew; rather this story comes to us from an LSS social worker named Matthew. Matthew's job with LSS involves working with people in prison who are living with mental illness, helping them prepare for life in the community when they are released. This program aims to reduce the likelihood that participants will commit another crime, by connecting them with a network of support in the community.

Matthew started working with Maria (name changed) when she was in prison for the third time. For Maria, life had been one struggle after another. Abuse. Addiction. Grief. Shame. At times, hopelessness. And at other times, a glimmer of hope that life could be different. In prison, Maria was encouraged (and sometimes even forced) to take some self-help courses. She learned about the Peer Support Specialist program, for people who have traveled the path of recovery from mental health and addiction and want to serve as a guide for others in recovery. She started to envision how one day, she could help others who felt lost and alone and hopeless.

As Maria's case manager, Matthew helped her work toward that goal, step by step, over the course of two years. After she was released from prison, he helped her go from being homeless to having her own apartment. He helped her sign up for Food Share when she needed it and helped her find work and manage her budget so she could get to the point where she could pay her own bills without assistance. He encouraged her as she pursued her career goal, successfully earning certification and finding employment as a Certified Recovery Coach and State Certified Peer Support Specialist.

Maria's testimony is powerful: *"For the first time in my life, someone believed in me...I will be forever grateful. I hope to be able to help others as he has helped me. I will spend the rest of my life giving back. I have a purpose in life. I have a will to live. Thank you for encouraging me, not judging me, giving me hope, and most of all, for believing in me."*

All across Wisconsin and upper Michigan, you support more than 800 servant-leaders who work with LSS to support families, couples, children, and individuals who are facing mental health challenges, recovering from abuse or loss of a parent, struggling with addiction, dealing with housing insecurity and financial hardship, or living with disabilities. In fact, by supporting Lutheran Social Services, you make a difference in the lives of 30,000 people every year.

Consider this – in Matthew's gospel, Jesus never scolds or rebukes the tax collectors and sinners he hangs out with. Instead, he says, "Follow me." He makes a place for them around the table. He invites them to be part of something better.

Because Lutherans like you cared enough to build and sustain this ministry we call Lutheran Social Services, people like Maria are still being called out of their isolation and hopelessness. They are hearing an invitation into something better. They are finding a place of belonging in our communities. They are living new lives of hope and purpose by helping others. What good news indeed! Thanks be to God.